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# YOGA FOR YOU

## From Strengthening The Mind-Body Connection To Helping You Connect With Your Child, Yoga Offers Parents Lots Of Benefits

By Meredith Lopez



Yoga, a Sanskrit word meaning “union,” is a centuries-old practice devoted to joining the mind, body and spirit in harmony. Whether you are a devoted yogini who can hold a perfect tittibhasana pose or a total beginner who doesn’t know a mudra from a tadasana, yoga can help you feel better in life. If you’re a parent, yoga can provide a wonderful opportunity to connect and have fun with your kids—from those still in the womb to tweens! How do you know if yoga is right for you? Some local gurus offer their sage advice on prenatal yoga, parent and child-classes, and yoga just for mom.

### Prenatal Yoga

As any woman who has ever been pregnant knows, there are things your body just won’t—or shouldn’t—do. But even if you’ve never unrolled a sticky mat or chanted “Ohm,” pregnancy’s an excellent time to start yoga.

“[It’s] a time for the expectant mother to step away from her busy life and take time for herself, and time to focus on her

baby,” says Debra Flashenberg, director of Prenatal Yoga Center on the Upper West Side.

The union of mind, body and spirit through purposeful breathing and poses helps the pregnant woman “connect to her breath and feel confident in her strength,” according to Flashenberg. “Prenatal yoga classes offer the mother an opportunity to learn about her likes and dislikes, and to get to know her body, so when it’s time for labor she has a myriad of familiar, comfortable positions to call upon.”

When looking for a class, Flashenberg recommends that students find a studio that has certified prenatal yoga teachers. “The anatomy and physiological state of the pregnant woman is very different than the non-pregnant woman,” she points out.

Even beyond the improvements to mind and body, prenatal yoga simply offers mummies-to-be a chance to connect with others. “Pregnancy can feel isolating if the mother-to-be doesn’t have friends going through the same experience,” says Flashenberg. “A prenatal yoga class can open up a space for discussion and build camaraderie.”

### Parent-Child Yoga

Now that the kid is here, and you’ve gotten the OK from your doctor or midwife to begin exercising, mommy & me yoga classes are a nice way to get back in the swing of things. “It’s a great bonding activity for the mom and child, by allowing the mom to get back into shape with her baby,” says Lauren Rosenfeld, founder of Yogi Beans, which has locations throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn, and offers postnatal classes for mothers and their babies starting from 6 weeks post-partum. “The class focuses on the mother, as well as incorporating simple baby stretches for the little one,” she says.

Shari Vilchez-Blatt, founder and director of Karma Kids Yoga on West 14th Street, emphasizes looking for a mommy & me class that takes place in a warm and open environment. “The babies really are the boss! Anything goes in our classes: crying, screaming, fussing, changing—whatever you need to do to tend to the baby,” she says.

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“Come early, come late. It’s really hard just getting out the door with a newborn, so we want moms to feel super-comfortable.”

As your mini-yogi gets bigger and more mobile, the classes tend to become more child-centered. Toddlercentered yoga emphasizes “physical coordination, body awareness and vocal communication,” according to Rosenfeld. Vilchez-Blatt also points out that “mentally, [yoga gives kids] confidence, self-esteem, brain-balance, and tools they can use to calm themselves when they’re frustrated or scared, or even [helps them] to fall asleep.”

At the same time, “You shouldn’t come to class with a 3-year-old expecting to do power yoga,” says Rosenfeld.

At this age, parent-child yoga is more about “a unique and adorable way to bond with your child,” and no previous yoga experience for adults is required.

The important thing to remember when finding a caregiver-child, kids-only, or family yoga class is that it should be fun for everyone.

### Adult Yoga for Beginners

If you find yourself inspired by the fun your child has doing a downward-dog, and you’re ready to try a grown-ups-only yoga class, Rebecca Merritt of New York Yoga on the Upper East Side has some advice. For the total beginner, she recommends Hatha yoga, which emphasizes breath control and postures; Vinyasa yoga, a more flow-centric practice; or a “gentle” class specifically geared toward beginners. Don’t worry if you can barely reach your toes. “Frankly,” advises Merritt, “if you are not flexible you need yoga even more!” For new moms, postpartum yoga can also be a great choice. “It helps your body return to pre-pregnancy shape,” says Joshua Margolis, founder of Mind Over Matter Health and Fitness. Not only that, but Margolis adds it can also decrease stress, help prevent post partum depression, and increase your energy level—something all new moms could use!

Merritt recommends that new students “seek out a nurturing environment where the teacher takes the time to assess the students’ needs.” A gentle nudge to the leg or a shift in balance can make all the difference to your yoga practice, so individual attention,

especially for beginners, is important. Merritt says that “a good yoga teacher is usually someone who has RYT (Registered Yoga Teacher) certification of 200 hours or more, someone who watches the class and assists, and should be approachable and make all levels of students feel comfortable.”

Jeanmarie Paolillo, who teaches at YogaWorks’ West Side and SoHo locations, agrees. “If there isn’t a sense of trust or connection between the student and teacher, it’s going to be hard for you to open up to the practice,” she says.

Finally, remember that yoga is about openness, acceptance and compassion. “It is a practice,” explains Emily Mudd, a teacher at Yoga Works, “not a perfect. Be patient and kind with yourself, and do your best to keep an open mind.”

## STRIKE A POSE

**These yoga studios offer classes for every age and level.**

**Elahi Garden.** This yoga studio has classes that bring kid and adults together to imagine, learn and relax. Mommy & me classes are offered, as are toddler and child classes. The adult yoga class lets parents get refreshed while children spend time in the playroom next door supervised by a babysitter. Various locations in Manhattan, 212- 249-0607, [elahiyoga.com](http://elahiyoga.com).

**Karma Kids Yoga.** New York’s only yoga studio just for kids, Karma Kids Yoga offers yoga classes for infants 6 weeks old through teens, Family Yoga, Circus Yoga, free Story Time Yoga, and Prenatal Yoga for mummies-to-be. Yoga Birthday Parties, too! 104 West 14th Street, 646-638-1444, [karmakidsyoga.com](http://karmakidsyoga.com).

**New York Yoga.** Offers adult yoga classes including prenatal yoga and classes for first-time students. They also have special weekly workshops for mommy & me, and kids. 1629 York Avenue, 212-717- YOGA, [newyorkyoga.com](http://newyorkyoga.com).

**Mind Over Matter Health & Fitness.** This personal training service send fitness professionals to your home, making it convenient for busy moms. Pre-natal and post-partum yoga classes focus on prepping your body for delivery, boosting your immunity, dealing with typical pregnancy woes and helping achieve a quicker postpartum recovery. 126 West 96th Street, 212-865-9290, [mindovermatternyc.com](http://mindovermatternyc.com).

**Prenatal Yoga Center.** Specializes in prenatal and postnatal yoga as well as provides education for expecting and new parents and families. In addition to mommy & me yoga, infant massage, and music, the center offers workshops and lectures that address issues related to pregnancy, childbirth, early childhood parenting, family dynamics, and alternative healing. 251 West 72nd Street, 212-362-2985, [prenatalyogacenter.com](http://prenatalyogacenter.com).

**YogaWorks.** Offers yoga for all levels and stages of life, including introductory yoga for adults, prenatal yoga, and yoga for kids and teens. Various locations in Manhattan, 212-650-9642, [yogaworks.com](http://yogaworks.com).

**Yogi Beans.** This yoga program emphasizes positive thinking and maintaining a healthy self-image. Created to help

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